

The Selective Use of Rape-Victim Stereotypes to Protect Culturally Similar Perpetrators

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## Abstract

Powerful stereotypes exist about how female rape victims should act. For example, victims are expected to physically resist their attacker and immediately report their assault. In reality, some victims are too shocked to physically resist or too traumatized to immediately go to the police. However, violations of rape-victim stereotypes can undermine fair prosecution outcomes, especially for acquaintance-rape victims. In the current research, we examined the influence of perceivers' cultural similarity to the perpetrator, and violations of rape-victim stereotypes, on victim and perpetrator blame, punishment severity, and guilt likelihood. We varied an acquaintance-rape scenario, to present stereotypical/counterstereotypical rape-victim behaviour, and the cultural similarity/dissimilarity of perpetrators to participants, who were White-Australian women and men, aged between 18 and 74 ( $N = 237$ ). In the victim-stereotypic condition, reactions did not vary as a function of perpetrator-cultural similarity. However, in the counterstereotypic-victim condition, culturally similar (compared to culturally dissimilar) perpetrators were considered less guilty and less deserving of punishment. Moderated mediation indicated that increases in victim blame and decreases in perpetrator blame explained the greater leniency shown towards culturally similar perpetrators. To decrease bias when prosecuting rape perpetrators, we recommend challenging the selective use of counterstereotypic-victim behaviour to defend culturally similar perpetrators.

*Keywords:* rape, blame, acquaintance rape, stereotyped attitudes, crime victims, perpetrators, violent crime, criminal responsibility

### The Selective Use of Rape-Victim Stereotypes to Protect Culturally Similar Perpetrators

The rape and sexual assault of women by men is a worldwide problem with very low rates of prosecution and conviction (Daly & Bouhours, 2010; United Nations, 2010). In Australia, it is estimated that 17 percent of women have been victims of rape and sexual assault (Australian Bureau of Statistics [ABS], 2012a), and similar figures are reported in the United States (Tjaden & Thoennes, 1998) and England (Ministry of Justice, Home Office & the Office for National Statistics, 2013). Compared to other crimes, such as robbery, women's behaviour as victims is subjected to significant levels of scrutiny (Bieneck & Krahe, 2010), and they are often suspected of making false reports (Ask, 2009).

Despite the often long-lasting trauma associated with rape and sexual assault (Resick, 1993), research examining victimization surveys in countries including Australia, the United States, and England, estimate that only 14 percent of women will report their assault to police (Daly & Bouhours, 2010). Among women who do report their assault, only 30 percent of cases will result in charges being pressed; only 20 percent of cases will be brought to trial; and a mere 6.5 percent will result in a conviction for the original offense charged (Daly & Bouhours, 2010). The attrition of rape cases within the criminal justice system underscores the importance of understanding factors that preclude the successful prosecution of perpetrators of rape.

### **Rape Prototypes and Victim Stereotypes**

One factor known to contribute to low reporting and conviction rates in the criminal prosecution of perpetrators, is that the way in which rape occurs is often very different from people's expectations (Anders & Christopher, 2011; Clark & Quadara, 2010; Heath, Lynch, Fritch, McArthur, & Smith, 2011). For example, people often erroneously believe that "real rape" involves a women being attacked by an "armed man jumping from the bushes" (Estrich, 1987, p. 8). However, analyses of victimisation surveys and official statistics from a

range of countries show that women are most frequently raped by men known to them (ABS, 2012a; Clark & Quadara, 2010; Daly & Bouhours, 2010; Fisher, 2005; United Nations, 2010).

People also believe that “real victims” should exhibit a particular set of behaviours, and researchers have shown that just about any aspect of a woman’s behaviour, before, during, or after an assault, can be used to increase victim blame and exonerate perpetrators (see Suarez & Gadalla, 2010; Whatley, 1996 for meta-analyses). For instance, female victims are more likely to be blamed for the assault if they wore revealing clothing (Workman & Freeburg, 1999); accepted payment for dinner (Basow & Minieri, 2010); voluntarily consumed drugs or alcohol (Girard & Senn, 2008) and/or became intoxicated (Lynch, Wasarhaley, Golding, & Simcic, 2013); had engaged in prior consensual sex with the perpetrator (Monson, Langhinrichsen-Rohling, & Binderup, 2000); or lacked an emotional demeanour when reporting the crime to police (Winkel & Koppelaar, 1991).

### **Perceptions of Victims of Acquaintance Rape**

McKimmie, Masser, and Bongiorno (2014) recently showed that counterstereotypic-victim behaviour is more likely to be used to undermine allegations made by victims of acquaintance rape, rather than stranger rape. Australian participants read summaries of a rape trial depicting either a prototypic rape circumstance—the complainant being attacked by a stranger in a car park late at night after leaving a party (stranger rape), or a nonprototypic rape circumstance—the complainant being attacked after going to the apartment of a man she had met at a party (acquaintance rape). The woman was described as either physically resisting and fully cooperating with police (stereotypic-victim behaviour), or not resisting, and not being fully cooperative with police (counterstereotypic-victim behaviour). Participants made a number of evaluations about the case, revealing that counterstereotypic-victim behaviour was most consequential in the acquaintance-rape context. For instance,

victim blame for counterstereotypic (compared to stereotypic) victims was significantly greater in the acquaintance-rape than in the stranger-rape context. Furthermore, only in the acquaintance-rape circumstance did counterstereotypic victim behaviour reduce ratings of perpetrator blame and guilt likelihood.

McKimmie and colleagues (2014) also presented qualitative analyses demonstrating that violations of rape-victim stereotypes were less consequential in the stranger-rape context, because the circumstances of the crime (i.e., the complainant having been approached in a car park at night) increased participants' feelings of difference from the defendant. Participants' feelings of difference from the defendant were indicated through their propensity to label the defendant a "predator" in the stranger-rape (but not in the acquaintance-rape) context (see Table 4, p. 2286 vs. Table 5, p. 2290 in McKimmie, Masser, & Bongiorno, 2014).

Participants' psychological distancing from the defendant appeared to make it easier for them to account for the victim's counterstereotypic behaviour. Participants claimed, for instance, that the complainant's fear of being killed was likely to have prevented her from physically resisting (e.g., "...that she didn't physically resist is not important as many people who do end up badly injured ..." McKimmie et al., 2014, Table 4, p. 2286). While immobilisation induced by fear could also occur in response to a woman being attacked by a known perpetrator (Clark & Quadara, 2010; Galliano, Noble, Travis, & Puechl, 1993), participants' increased basis for feeling similar to the defendant in the acquaintance-rape context also seemed to increase their willingness to use the victim's counterstereotypic behaviour in his defence (e.g., "If she was serious, she would have physically tried to stop him" McKimmie et al., 2014, Table 7, p. 2292). We designed the current study to further examine systematically whether perceivers' similarity to rape defendants influences perceptions of a rape victim's case.

### **A Perpetrator "Like Me"**

The idea that a victim's counterstereotypic behaviour is more likely to be used to undermine the victim's allegations when the perceivers are similar to the perpetrators is consistent with research in the social identity tradition (Tajfel, 1978; Tajfel & Turner, 1986; Turner, Hogg, Oakes, Reicher, & Wetherell, 1987). From this theoretical perspective, there are many valued social dimensions upon which people can make judgments about their similarity to others. Features highlighted within a given social context (e.g., another's occupation, ethnicity, or gender) are used to categorize others as similar to, or different from, the self. Where similarity to an accused wrongdoer is highlighted, people may show bias in favour of that wrongdoer, because of the potentially negative implications that person's guilt would have for their own self-concept. Social identity researchers claim that positive bias towards similar others occurs because people are motivated to see themselves, and by implication the members of ingroups and/or the broader social categories they belong to, in a positive light (Leach, Ellemers, & Barreto, 2007; Tajfel & Turner, 1986). To maintain a positive view of one's group (and where it is plausible to do so), flaws in an ingroup members' behaviour may be overlooked or reinterpreted, or the blame may be shifted elsewhere (Iyer, Jetten, & Haslam, 2012; Leach, Bou Zeineddine, & Cehajic-Clancy, 2013; van Prooijen, 2006).

In the case of rape, labelling an accused perpetrator who seems "like me" as "a rapist" is likely to be particularly threatening to one's self-concept. Men typically respond defensively to the suggestion that they could be rape perpetrators (Scheel, Johnson, Schneider, & Smith, 2001). Rape victims—particularly women raped by men known to them—may also struggle to categorize what occurred to them as "rape," or the person responsible as a "rapist" (Clark & Quadara, 2010; Heath et al., 2011). The tendency to categorize rapists, not as someone like me (i.e., from one's own social world) but as other, may help to explain why both women and men may be motivated to apply rape-victim

stereotypes in a similar perpetrator's defence (cf. McKimmie et al., 2014). For dissimilar perpetrators (e.g., those who attack women in dark alleys, or who are different on another valued social dimension, such as ethnicity), defensive reactions are likely to be reduced, minimizing the likelihood that a victim's counterstereotypic behaviour will have a negative impact on how their case is perceived.

Consistent with social identity theory, many studies of racial and ethnic prejudice, and of prejudice towards outgroups more generally, have confirmed that differential evaluations of ingroup behaviour occurs, not because of antipathy towards the outgroup (negative-outgroup bias), but because positive sentiments, such as sympathy and trust, are reserved for the ingroup (positive-ingroup bias; see Brewer, 1999 for a review of the relevant literature). Compared to outgroups, people are more likely to give ingroups the benefit of the doubt when making attributions for negative behaviours (Hunter, Stringer, & Watson, 1991; Schrujijer et al., 1994; Weber, 1994), and are more likely to help ingroup members in ambiguous situations (Frey & Gaertner, 1986).

No research to date has examined whether violations of rape-victim stereotypes are more likely to be applied to defend similar perpetrators. However, research by Bal and van den Bos (2010) found that perpetrator similarity did bias male students' reactions to rape. Using college students in the Netherlands, Bal and van den Bos manipulated perpetrator similarity by describing an alleged male perpetrator as a student, or as either a professor (Studies 1 and 2), or a working adult (Study 3). Male students were more likely to physically distance themselves from (Study 1), to blame (Study 2), and to derogate (Study 3), a rape victim if the alleged perpetrator was a student like them, rather than a professor or a working adult.

Research on the impact of perpetrator ethnicity and perceptions of rape also suggests that cultural similarity to a perpetrator may influence how rape is perceived. Using

predominately White (58%; 33% Asian; 10% African American, Latino or other) college students in the United States, George and Martinez (2002) varied the ethnicity (White vs. Black) of male perpetrators and female victims, and the characteristics of the rape. A woman out looking for her cat was described as being raped after responding to friendly comments made by either an unknown man on the street (who pushed her into her house), or a neighbour (whom she invited into her house). For male, but not female, participants, an interaction between the characteristics of the rape and perpetrator race was found. Only in the unknown-perpetrator scenario were male participants' sentencing recommendations more lenient for White than for Black perpetrators. Male participants' modern racism scores did not moderate these findings, suggesting that rather than antiBlack attitudes, different sentencing recommendations may have reflected male participants' tendencies to give White, unknown male perpetrators the benefit of the doubt.

In the current research, we examined how ingroup bias affects the application of rape-victim stereotypes. Harrison, Howerton, Secarea and Nguyen (2008) found that more favourable evaluations of ingroup than outgroup victims only occurred when the victim's behaviour was counterstereotypic. Across two studies, participants perceived ingroup victims (victims from the same university as participants versus victims from a different university) more positively, and attributed more guilt to their rapist, only when victims were promiscuous or intoxicated (counterstereotypic). For chaste and sober victims (stereotypic), ingroup status had no bearing on reactions to their rape.

Applying Harrison et al.'s (2008) findings to the current research on perpetrator similarity and rape-victim stereotype use, it seems equally likely that perceivers will more readily apply counterstereotypic-victim behaviour to defend ingroup perpetrators. A victim's counterstereotypic behaviour could be used to generate doubt about what occurred, and perceivers may be motivated to give perpetrators who are ingroup members the benefit of the



doubt (Brewer, 1999). When a victim's behaviour is stereotypic and minimal ambiguity about what occurred exists, perpetrator similarity may be less likely to have a bearing on how rape is perceived. Considering the pernicious effects of rape-victim stereotypes, it is important to gain a greater understanding of whether rape stereotypes are likely to be applied to defend similar versus dissimilar perpetrators.

### **Overview of the Current Study**

In the present research, we examined whether ratings of victim and perpetrator blame, punishment severity, and guilt likelihood varied as a function of whether victim behaviour was described as stereotypical or counterstereotypical, and whether the perpetrator was described as similar or dissimilar to participants. To examine our hypotheses, we adapted the summary of a court case involving acquaintance rape that McKimmie et al. (2014) used. We manipulated perpetrator similarity to the participants by varying the target's cultural background; all participants were Australians from the ethnically-White majority.

Australia, like the United States, is a settler society and Indigenous Australians represent 2.5 percent of the population (ABS, 2012b). Historically, most migration has been from Europe. Since the 1970s, migration from Asia and other parts of the world has increased. Over 300 ancestries were identified in the last census, and the most commonly reported (with a maximum of two ancestries per person recorded) was English (36%) and Australian (35%). Six of the top ten ancestries reported reflected European heritage; the remaining two were Chinese (4%) and Indian (2%; ABS, 2012c). The majority of the population reported a Christian affiliation (61%); the next largest group (22%) reported no religious affiliation. Just over 7% of the population reported non-Christian, with Buddhism (2.5%), Islam (2.2%), and Hinduism (1.3%), the top three alternative religions (ABS, 2012c). The majority of Australians (81%) reported speaking only English at home, while only 2% reported speaking no English (ABS, 2012c).

As in other multicultural societies (Brubaker, 2001; Reicher & Hopkins, 2001), cultural background (signified by ethnicity, religion and/or language), is an important dimension for making judgments about similarity to and difference from others within Australia (Dunn, Forrest, Burnley, & McDonald, 2004). One's cultural background is also known to influence outcomes within the criminal justice system (Poynting & Mason, 2006; Warner, 2004), making it a particularly important dimension of similarity to examine.

McKimmie et al. (2014), did not explicitly examine the cultural similarity of the accused perpetrator to the participants (the majority of whom were Australians with an ethnically-White background). However, similarity was implied through the perpetrator's stereotypically White name, Jim. To manipulate cultural similarity for the current research, we systematically varied the name and nationality of the perpetrator to majority-White participants. We described targets as being from a culturally similar Western background (America, England), or from a culturally dissimilar Eastern background (India, Pakistan), and adapted names accordingly. Following McKimmie et al. (2014), we also varied the stereotypicality of the rape victim's behaviour.

As we were using cultural background to manipulate perpetrator similarity, we included a measure of racial prejudice to control for potential effects associated with negative outgroup bias. In the United States, negative stereotypes that Black men are inclined to rape White women exist (cf. George & Martinez, 2002). In Australia, it is possible that beliefs that ethnic minority men pose a threat to the safety of White women could also influence responses. In recent years, Muslim men in particular have been singled out and labeled misogynistic or sexist and viewed as posing a threat to Australia's egalitarian culture (Ho, 2007). While we did not emphasise the Muslim background of dissimilar perpetrators (e.g., those from Pakistan), we were aware that responding could nevertheless have been tainted by negative-outgroup bias, justifying our inclusion of racial prejudice as a covariate.

### **Study Design and Hypotheses**

In the current study, we implemented a 2 (Perpetrator-Cultural Similarity: similar, dissimilar) x 2 (Victim Stereotypicality: stereotypic, counterstereotypic) x 2 (Participant Gender: male, female) between-participants design. We predicted a victim-stereotypicality by perpetrator-cultural-similarity interaction. When the victim's behaviour conformed to stereotypes (victim stereotypic), we did not expect perpetrator and victim evaluations to vary with perpetrator-cultural similarity (Hypothesis 1). However, when the victim's behaviour did not conform to stereotypes (victim counterstereotypic), we predicted that victim blame would be greater, and that perpetrator blame, punishment severity, and guilt likelihood would be less, among culturally similar, compared to culturally dissimilar, perpetrators (Hypothesis 2). We also predicted that reduced punishment severity and guilt likelihood for culturally similar perpetrators in the counterstereotypic-victim condition would be explained by the increase in victim blame and decrease in perpetrator blame (Hypothesis 3).

We did not expect the perpetrator-cultural-similarity by victim-stereotypicality interaction to be moderated by participant gender. McKimmie et al. (2014) reported participant gender did not moderate the interaction between rape type and victim stereotypicality. They reported there were tendencies for women and men to seek to protect culturally similar perpetrators from allegations of rape (for related findings, see Heath et al., 2011). For the current research, we predicted that women, like men, would use counterstereotypic-victim behaviour to excuse culturally similar perpetrators (Hypothesis 4). However, based on men's gender-based similarity to perpetrators (and gender-based dissimilarity to victims), and past research showing that men are more likely than women to blame women for being raped and/or more likely to recommend shorter sentences for male perpetrators (George & Martinez, 2002; Workman & Freeburg, 1999; see Grubb & Harrower, 2008; Suarez & Gadallla, 2010 for meta-analyses), we predicted main effects for participant

gender. We expected men to be more positive towards perpetrators and less positive towards victims than women (Hypothesis 5).

### **Method**

The Ethical Review Committee of The University of Queensland approved the study. Participants' indicated their consent at two points: (1) by clicking the ">>" icon at the bottom of the online consent form, and (2) by submitting of the completed survey. A professional survey company (Qualtrics) administered the survey online and managed risks associated with the potential for online confidentiality breaches. At no point was personally identifying information (e.g., names, email addresses) of participants provided to researchers. These procedures attend to the guidelines established by the Board of Scientific Affairs Advisory Group on conducting research on the internet (Kraut et al., 2004). We conducted all analyses using SPSS Statistics 22 software.

### **Participants**

Australian community participants were recruited to complete the survey online by Qualtrics. The majority of Australians have access to the internet (83%), and those who do not tend to have lower levels of education (ABS, 2014a). The survey was advertised to a national sample as being about "perceptions of defendants and complainants of rape," and participant compensation was determined and administered by Qualtrics. Qualtrics does not disclose how much participants receive for completing the survey.

For inclusion in the initial analyses, we screened two hundred and ninety-nine adult participants who identified that they were Australian citizens from an ethnically White background (i.e., White skinned/of European origin). Of the four-hundred and sixty-four adult participants initially collected, 49 were not Australian citizens and a further 116 were not ethnically White.

Women constituted 53.8% of the final sample (161 females vs. 138 males), roughly the same as in the Australian population as a whole (50.2% female; ABS, 2014b).

Participants ranged in age from 18 to 81 years, with a mean age of 47 years ( $SD = 14$ ) and a median age of 48 years. The median age for the Australian population (including those under 18) is 37.3 years (ABS, 2014b). Participants had varying levels of educational attainment (38% high school; 30.4% Technical and Further Education (TAFE), 31.5% undergraduate degree or above). While the percentage of this sample with a postschool qualification was roughly equivalent to the population as a whole (62% vs. 59% respectively), the percentage of those with an undergraduate degree or above was higher in this sample than in the population as a whole (31.5% vs. 24%, respectively; ABS, 2008).

### **Materials and Procedure**

**Perpetrator-cultural similarity manipulation.** We used two origin countries, and two perpetrator names for each country, for both levels of perpetrator-cultural similarity, to ensure effects could not be attributed to individual countries and/or perpetrator names. For the culturally similar perpetrators, the two origin countries (and names) were England (James/Andrew) and America (Michael/Daniel). England and America, like Australia, are “Western” countries (Arnason, 2003), with majority White European populations of Christian heritage and English as the predominant language. India (Sanjiv/Padmash) and Pakistan (Ahmed/Zahid) were the origin countries (and names) for the culturally dissimilar perpetrators. India and Pakistan, unlike Australia, are “Eastern” countries (Arnason, 2003), whose predominate ethnic, religious, and language traditions are different from those in Australia. Individuals from these backgrounds within Australia fit within one or more of the major cultural outgroups (i.e., that of “Asian” and/or “Muslim,” see Dunn et al., 2004).

**Victim stereotypicality manipulation.** We manipulated the stereotypicality of the victim’s behaviour by varying whether or not she physically resisted the attacker, and

whether or not she was fully cooperative with police in their investigations. Previous research has shown that physical resistance is positively correlated with both a woman's likelihood of reporting her assault to the police (Du Mont, Miller, & Myhr, 2003), and with the successful prosecution of rape cases (Gunn & Linden, 1997), indicating that this behaviour is considered stereotypic of rape victims. Previous research has also shown that people expect victims to be fully cooperative with police investigations (Masser, Lee, & McKimmie, 2010). McKimmie et al. (2014) used both these behaviours to manipulate victim stereotypicality in their research. Consistent with past research, their qualitative analyses revealed that participants considered both these dimensions when determining whether or not rape had occurred (McKimmie et al., 2014, Table 5, p. 2290), and their quantitative analyses confirmed the status of these behaviours as rape-victim stereotypes (especially in the context of an acquaintance rape; see McKimmie et al., 2014, Table 3, p. 2285). We described the complainant as Australian, and used two names (Rebecca/Emma) for each version, to ensure effects could not be attributed to individual victim names.

**Instructions and scenarios.** Participants were randomly assigned to experimental conditions, regardless of gender. Before being presented with the scenario, participants were provided with instructions, which included a definition of rape consistent with the Australian criminal code. Variations exist in the definition of rape within Australian jurisdictions, but the definition provided was consistent with all jurisdictional definitions (<http://www.aifs.gov.au/acssa/pubs/sheets/rs1/rs1appendix.html>). The instructions participants received were as follows:

Please carefully read the following scenario, which involves a summary of evidence in a case concerning an allegation of rape. As you read the scenario, bear in mind that in the criminal code, 'rape' is defined in the following way: A person must not have sexual intercourse with anyone without the other person's consent. When you have

finished reading the summary of the evidence, you will be asked to take a few minutes to write down your impressions of the case, and then respond to a number of questions about the case.

Following the instructions, participants were presented with the scenario that was adapted from the acquaintance rape scenarios used in McKimmie et al.'s (2014) research. In McKimmie et al.'s (2014) research, 6.4 percent of participants noted that the realism of the scenarios was compromised because the defendant's testimony was missing. To increase the realism of the scenarios, we included a paragraph summarizing the defendant's testimony; comments questioning the realism of the scenarios were not made by any participants in the current study.

We also provided extra information to manipulate the cultural background of the defendant. The defendant was described as on a temporary work visa from one of the foreign countries used, and in the scenario we explicitly mentioned the Australian background of the complainant. We noted that the alleged rape occurred following a work Christmas party; the scenario McKimmie and colleagues (2014) used referred only to a party. We included the work Christmas party as a reference to the Western cultural context of the alleged crime, rather than a religious reference. In Australia, where the importance of religion has declined (in contrast to the United States; see Norris & Inglehart, 2011), Christmas has become a secular custom (albeit one with a Christian heritage). Thus Christmas, which also coincides with the start of an extended summer holiday, is commonly celebrated in the workplace without reference to religion (Voloder, 2012). Participants read the following scenario:

[Defendant name] has been in Australia for 3 years on a temporary work visa from [defendant country]. He is charged with the rape of [complainant name], an Australian woman who was working at the same company as [defendant name]. The rape is

alleged to have occurred after a work Christmas party, where [defendant name] and [complainant name] met.

During the trial, the Prosecutor called [complainant name] to the stand to testify about the events that led up to the alleged rape. In her testimony, when questioned by the Prosecutor, [complainant name] stated that she arrived at the work Christmas party around 6:30 pm and was soon introduced to a man named [defendant name], who she recognised from work but had not previously met. [Complainant name] testified that they spent the night laughing, dancing, and talking with each other and that at the end of the night, she had accepted an invitation by [defendant name] to go back to his apartment to talk some more and have coffee.

When they got to his apartment, [complainant name] stated that she and [defendant name] started kissing and caressing each other. According to [complainant name], [defendant name] then grabbed her and tried to take her clothes off in order to have sex with her. [Complainant name] stated at this point she asked [defendant name] to stop. Under cross examination by the Defence Barrister, [complainant name] testified that she ‘repeatedly pushed [defendant name] away with all of her might, and tried as hard as she could to cross her legs to keep him from removing her clothes’ (victim stereotypic); or ‘did not try to physically resist [defendant name]’ (victim counterstereotypic). The [complainant name] testified that [defendant name] did not listen to her, and instead used force to hold her down and eventually penetrate her.

The Prosecution also called the police officer to whom [complainant name] reported the allegations of rape to the stand to testify. He confirmed that [complainant name] had reported the same alleged events as given in her testimony. Under cross-examination by the Defense Barrister, the police officer revealed that upon reporting the incident to police, [complainant name] had stated that she ‘had tried to physically



resist [defendant name] during the assault’ (victim stereotypic); or ‘did not try to physically resist [defendant name] (victim counterstereotypic). Further, the police officer testified that [complainant name] ‘fully cooperated with the police in their investigations’ (victim stereotypic); or ‘appeared generally unwilling to cooperate with the police in their investigations’ (victim counterstereotypic).

The Defence Barrister called [defendant name] to the stand to testify about the events that took place on the night the alleged rape. In his testimony, [defendant name] confirmed that he had met [complainant name] at the work Christmas party and invited her back to his apartment where they had consensual sex. Under cross-examination by the Prosecution Barrister, [defendant name] testified that he could not recall [complainant name] asking him to stop and that he had formed the impression that he had obtained [complainant name’s] consent due to the fact that she had agreed to come back to his apartment and willingly kissed and caressed him.

In concluding remarks, the Prosecution Barrister argued that [complainant name] was the victim of a rape that resulted from [defendant name] not listening to [complainant name’s] requests to stop being physically intimate. The Defense Barrister argued that this was not a case of rape because [defendant name] had obtained [complainant name’s] consent, and that [complainant name] had simply experienced regret or shame about the sexual encounter after the fact, and was alleging that [defendant name] raped her in order to feel better about what had happened.

**Measures.** Following the scenarios, participants were asked to write about their impressions of the case before completing the dependent measures. Where multiple items were used, we calculated the composite score as a mean (see Table 1 for correlations between

measures). After this, participants completed manipulation checks, measures of racial prejudice, and demographic items.

We measured the extent to which participants believed the perpetrator was guilty of rape, guilt likelihood, with a single item: “How likely is it that the defendant is guilty of rape?” Participants responded on a scale from 1 (*not at all*) to 7 (*very much*), adapted from a measure used by McKimmie et al. (2014). We also measured whether the punishment was appropriate for the perpetrator if they were found guilty, punishment severity, with a single item: “If a jury found the defendant guilty of rape, how severe do you think his punishment should be?” Participants responded on a scale from 1 (*not at all severe*) to 7 (*very severe*). We adapted this item from a measure used by George and Martinez (2002).

To measure perpetrator and victim blame, we adapted items from McKimmie et al. (2014). We used five items to assess the extent to which participants believed the perpetrator was to blame for what occurred (e.g., “Do you think the defendant should blame himself for what happened?” Responses ranged from 1 = *not at all* to 7 = *completely*; “How much control do you think the defendant had over the situation” Responses ranged from 1 = *none* to 7 = *total*). Cronbach’s  $\alpha$  was .80, similar to the Cronbach’s  $\alpha$  of .81 in McKimmie et al.’s (2007) research. We used five comparable items, adapted from McKimmie et al. (2014), to assess the extent to which participants believed that the victim was to blame for what occurred (e.g., “Do you think the complainant should blame herself for what happened?” Responses ranged from 1 = *not at all* to 7 = *completely*; “How much control do you think the complainant had over the situation?” Responses ranged from 1 = *none* to 7 = *total*). Cronbach’s  $\alpha$  for these items was .85, identical to the Cronbach’s  $\alpha$  in McKimmie et al.’s (2014) research.

**Manipulation checks.** We used four items (two reverse scored) to measure the cultural similarity manipulation (e.g., “I feel similar to the defendant,” “I feel that I would

have very little in common with the defendant,” Responses ranged from 1 = *strongly disagree* to 7 = *strongly agree*,  $\alpha = .79$ ). We created seven items to measure the manipulation of victim-stereotypicality (e.g., “During the alleged rape, how similar was the complainant's behaviour to that of a typical rape victim?,” “When reporting the incident to the police, did the complainant behave in a way that is typical of a women who has been raped?” Responses ranged from 1 = *not at all* to 7 = *very much*;  $\alpha = .79$ ). We also included a question that asked participants to indicate which country the defendant and the complainant were from.

**Racial prejudice.** To measure racial prejudice, we drew on research by Forrest and Dunn (2007), who used a wide range of indicators of racial prejudice that they examined individually, to investigate its sociospatial aspects in a large Australian city. Nine items they used were rated on a single scale, and we used seven of these items to form a single racial prejudice scale. The items were: “It is NOT a good idea for people of different races to marry one another,” “All races of people are equal,” “You feel secure when you are with people of different ethnic backgrounds,” “It is a good thing for a society to be made up of people from different cultures,” “Australia is weakened by people of different ethnic origins sticking to their old ways,” “There is racial prejudice in Australia,” “Anglo-Australians enjoy a privileged position in our society,” Responses ranged from 1 = *strongly disagree* to 7 = *strongly agree*). The two items we excluded were “You are prejudiced against other cultures,” because very few people self-identify as prejudiced (Forrest & Dunn, 2007; Peake & Kobayashi, 2000); and “Humankind is made up of separate races,” because beliefs in natural racial groups are widespread (Forrest & Dunn, 2007; Hannaford, 1996) and not reliably related to prejudice (Haslam, Rothschild, & Ernst, 2002).

As Forrest and Dunn (2007) analysed each item individually, to use these items as a scale, we first submitted them to an exploratory factor analysis (Principal Axis Factoring). Scree plots revealed a single factor, explaining 39% of the variance, with four items loading

strongly (factor loadings > .55, representing “very good” loadings; Tabachnick & Fidel, 2001): “It is NOT a good idea for people of different races to marry one another,” “All races of people are equal” (reverse scored), “You feel secure when you are with people of different ethnic backgrounds” (reverse scored), “It is a good thing for a society to be made up of people from different cultures” (reverse scored). These items formed a reliable scale ( $\alpha = .78$ ), with higher scores representing greater racial prejudice.

**Perceptions of rapist stereotypicality and victim similarity.** We also measured how typical the defendant was to stereotypic perceptions of rapists in general (i.e., “How similar is the defendant to the type of person who typically commits rape?”). If culturally-different defendants were perceived as more stereotypic of rapists than culturally similar defendants, this may indicate racist beliefs concerning the greater likelihood of rape being committed by ethnic-minority men. To measure perceived victim similarity, we adapted the same four items used to measure the manipulation of perpetrator-cultural similarity (e.g., “I feel similar to the complainant,” Responses ranged from 1 = *strongly disagree* to 7 = *strongly agree*,  $\alpha = .81$ ).

**Demographics.** Participants’ indicated their gender, age, education level, and Australian citizenship. We used the following open-ended question to determine participants’ ethnic background, “What is your ethnic background? (e.g., African, European).” We classified as ethnically White participants who answered “European” (the most frequent response) and/or specified a European heritage (e.g., “English,” “Dutch,” “West European”), or answered “Caucasian,” “White,” “Anglo-Celtic,” “Anglo-Saxon,” or “Australian” (long-present Anglo-Australians often identify their ethnic background as “Australian”; Dunn et al., 2004). We excluded participants who indicated that their ethnic background was mixed (e.g., “Australian and Chinese”), or non-European (e.g., “Pakistani,” “Asian,” “Indigenous”). Participants’ also indicated if they had prior jury service, because of its possible impact on conviction and sentencing (Dillehay & Nietzel, 1985; Himelein, Nietzel, & Dillehay, 1991).

## Results

### Data Analysis Plan

Our analyses followed three phases. In the first phase, we performed preliminary analyses of manipulations and measures. In the second phase, we performed ANCOVAs (analyses of covariance) and simple-effects analyses, to test Hypotheses 1, 2, 4 and 5. In the third phase, we ran moderated mediations, to test Hypothesis 3. For the ANCOVAs (including simple-effects analyses) and moderated mediations, we included racial prejudice as a covariate, to control for potential effects associated with resentment/hostility towards members of cultural/ethnic outgroups.

### Preliminary Analyses of Manipulations and Measures

Of the 299 White-Australian citizens that we screened for inclusion in the initial analyses, we excluded 59 participants (19.7%) who incorrectly answered the question regarding the perpetrators' country of origin. Of the remaining participants, we excluded another three participants who incorrectly answered the question regarding the victims' country of origin, leaving 237 participants for the final analyses (105 men, 132 women;  $M_{\text{age}} = 45.65$ ,  $SD = 13.68$ ; 39.2% high school, 28.3% TAFE, 32.5% undergraduate degree or higher). Of the remaining 237 participants, 23 (9.7%) reported prior jury service, however we found that results were unaffected in preliminary analyses, and it was not considered further. For both the victim-stereotypic and victim-counterstereotypic conditions, the number of male and female participants in the two perpetrator-cultural similarity conditions did not significantly differ,  $\chi^2(1) < .57$ ,  $ps > .45$ . The sample size provided adequate power (.8) to identify effect sizes corresponding to partial eta-squared equal to .03.

The different countries used may have affected perceptions of perpetrator-cultural similarity; we compared the culturally similar (America, England) and the culturally dissimilar (India, Pakistan) countries on the perpetrator-cultural similarity measure, and

found no effects. There were no perpetrator-cultural-similarity effects when we compared the two names used for each country. Thus, we did not include the two countries (within each of the two levels of perpetrator-cultural similarity) and two perpetrator names (within each of the four countries used) in subsequent analyses. Finally, there were no differences for victim stereotypicality when we compared the two victim names, so we did not include individual victim names in subsequent analyses.

### **Perceived perpetrator-cultural similarity and perceived victim stereotypicality.**

To determine whether the manipulation of perpetrator-cultural similarity and victim stereotypicality had the effects anticipated, we conducted 2 (Perpetrator-Cultural Similarity) x 2 (Victim Stereotypicality) x 2 (Participant Gender) analysis of variances (ANOVAs) on the manipulation checks. For perpetrator-cultural similarity, the manipulation had the intended effect,  $F(1, 229) = 4.86, p = .028, \eta_p^2 = .02$ , as perpetrators from Western cultures ( $M = 2.79, SD = 1.32$ ), were perceived as more similar to participants than perpetrators from Eastern cultures ( $M = 2.37, SD = 1.21$ ). There was also a main effect for victim stereotypicality,  $F(1, 229) = 6.91, p = .009, \eta_p^2 = .03$ , with participants feeling more similar towards perpetrators in the victim-counterstereotypic ( $M = 2.90, SD = 1.28$ ), than in the victim-stereotypic ( $M = 2.36, SD = 1.25$ ) condition. The main effect for participant gender was a non-significant trend ( $M_{\text{male}} = 2.85, SD = 1.17; M_{\text{female}} = 2.43, SD = 1.36, p = .064$ ). There were no other significant effects (all  $p$ s > .31).

For victim stereotypicality, results revealed that the manipulation had the intended effect,  $F(1, 229) = 92.12, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .29$ , as the victim's behaviour in the stereotypic condition ( $M = 5.15, SD = .88$ ) was perceived as more stereotypic of a victim than the victim's behaviour in the counterstereotypic condition ( $M = 3.80, SD = 1.13$ ). There was also a main effect for participant gender,  $F(1, 229) = 7.72, p = .006, \eta_p^2 = .03$ , with men ( $M =$

4.27,  $SD = 1.08$ ) perceiving victim behaviour as less stereotypic of a victim than women ( $M = 4.71$ ,  $SD = 1.28$ ). No other effects were significant (all  $ps > .72$ ).

**Racial prejudice, perceived rapist stereotypicality and perceived victim similarity.** In addition to manipulation checks, we used the same 2 x 2 x 2 ANOVAs to examine whether there were effects of the experimental conditions on racial prejudice, perceived rapist stereotypicality, and perceived victim similarity. For racial prejudice, there were no effects relating to the experimental conditions or participant gender (all  $ps > .23$ ). For the measure of perceived rapist stereotypicality, there was a main effect only for participant gender and victim stereotypicality. Women compared to men,  $F(1, 229) = 6.71$ ,  $p = .01$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = .03$ :  $M_{\text{female}} = 4.59$ ,  $SD = 1.62$ ;  $M_{\text{male}} = 3.98$ ,  $SD = 1.38$ , and participants in the victim-stereotypic compared to victim-counterstereotypic condition,  $F(1, 229) = 9.78$ ,  $p = .002$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = .04$ :  $M_{\text{counterstereotypic}} = 3.95$ ,  $SD = 1.54$ ;  $M_{\text{stereotypic}} = 4.66$ ,  $SD = 1.48$ , perceived the defendant as more stereotypic of a person who commits rape. There were no significant main effects or interactions involving the perpetrator-cultural-similarity condition (all  $ps > .32$ ). Thus, culturally dissimilar perpetrators ( $M = 4.36$ ,  $SD = 1.48$ ), were considered no more stereotypic of a person who commits rape than culturally similar perpetrators ( $M = 4.29$ ,  $SD = 1.59$ ). Finally, for perceived victim similarity, while there were no effects relating to the experimental manipulations, there was a main effect for participant gender,  $F(1, 229) = 22.78$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = .09$ , with men ( $M = 3.33$ ,  $SD = 1.15$ ) feeling less similar towards victims, than women ( $M = 4.17$ ,  $SD = 1.36$ ; all other  $ps > .18$ ).

**Correlations.** To ensure that relations between the measures of victim blame, perpetrator blame, punishment severity, guilt likelihood, and the racial prejudice covariate, were in expected directions, we performed correlational analyses. Table 1 shows correlations between the measures, which were all in expected directions. Victim blame was negatively correlated with perpetrator blame, punishment severity, and guilt likelihood. Perpetrator

blame, punishment severity, and guilt likelihood were all positively correlated. The highest correlation was between perpetrator blame and guilt likelihood ( $r = .68$ ). Racial prejudice was positively correlated with victim blame, and negatively correlated with perpetrator blame, punishment severity, and guilt likelihood, consistent with patterns found between racial prejudice and reactions to rape by George and Martinez (2002).

### **Testing the Effects of the Manipulations**

We performed separate analyses of covariance (ANCOVAs), using a 2 (Perpetrator-Cultural Similarity)  $\times$  2 (Victim Stereotypicality)  $\times$  2 (Participant Gender) design, with racial prejudice as a covariate<sup>1</sup>, for the key measures of victim blame, perpetrator blame, punishment severity and guilt likelihood. The ANCOVAs (in addition to simple-effects analyses) allowed us to test whether perpetrator-cultural similarity influenced rape evaluations in the counterstereotypic-victim condition (Hypothesis 2), but not in the stereotypic-victim condition (Hypothesis 1). We followed up the ANCOVAs with simple-effects analyses, comparing means between the two levels of perpetrator-cultural similarity, within each level of victim-stereotypicality. The same ANCOVAs also allowed us to test whether women, like men, used counterstereotypic-victim behaviour to excuse culturally similar perpetrators (Hypothesis 4), and whether men's responses were more favourable towards perpetrators, and less favourable towards victims, than women's (Hypothesis 5).

Findings from the ANCOVAs revealed consistent effects. There were significant main effects of victim stereotypicality for the measures of victim blame,  $F(1, 228) = 7.35, p = .007, \eta_p^2 = .03$ ; perpetrator blame,  $F(1, 228) = 17.18, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .07$ ; punishment severity,  $F(1, 228) = 29.91, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .12$ ; and guilt likelihood  $F(1, 228) = 23.97, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .10$ . For perpetrator-cultural similarity, there was a main effect for punishment severity,  $F(1, 228) = 5.12, p = .025, \eta_p^2 = .02$ , while for perpetrator blame and guilt likelihood, main effects trended in the same direction, but were not significant ( $F(1, 228) =$



3.15,  $p = .077$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = .014$ ;  $F(1, 228) = 3.13$ ,  $p = .078$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = .01$ , respectively). The main effect for victim blame on this measure was not significant ( $p = .224$ )

As shown in Table 2, the predicted interaction between victim stereotypicality and perpetrator-cultural similarity was significant for victim blame, perpetrator blame, and punishment severity. For guilt likelihood, the interaction trended in the predicted direction but was not significant ( $p = .061$ ). Simple-effects analyses revealed that in the victim-stereotypic condition, there were no significant differences in victim blame, perpetrator blame, punishment severity, or guilt likelihood for culturally similar, compared to culturally dissimilar, perpetrators, consistent with Hypothesis 1. However, in the victim counterstereotypic condition, significant differences were found on all measures. That is, victim blame was greater, and perpetrator blame, punishment severity, and guilt likelihood were less for culturally similar perpetrators, than for culturally dissimilar perpetrators. These results were consistent with Hypothesis 2, although the results for guilt likelihood should be treated with caution due to the marginal interaction.

Findings from the ANCOVAs also revealed that the perpetrator-cultural similarity by victim stereotypicality interactions were not moderated by participant gender; no significant three-way interactions for any of the four key measures were revealed (all  $ps > .32$ ). These findings supported Hypothesis 4, that women, like men, would use counterstereotypic-victim behaviour to excuse culturally similar perpetrators. Inconsistent with Hypothesis 5, that men would be more positive towards perpetrators, and less positive towards victims, than women, findings from the ANCOVAs revealed no main effects of participant gender for any of the four key measures (all  $ps > .10$ ).

### **Moderated Mediations**

To test Hypothesis 3, we conducted moderated mediations analysis (with victim blame and perpetrator blame as parallel mediators) on the measures of punishment severity

and guilt likelihood. We tested the mediators in parallel using Hayes' (2013) "Process" macro for SPSS (with 5000 bootstrap samples). For punishment severity, as shown in Figure 1 (Panel A), when we entered both mediators (victim blame and perpetrator blame) into the model, the significant interaction effect for punishment severity became non-significant. Bias corrected 95% confidence intervals for both victim blame [-.302, -.002], and perpetrator blame [-.735, -.126] did not include zero, showing that both were significant mediators.

For guilt likelihood, even though the victim stereotypicality by perpetrator cultural similarity interaction was not significant in the ANCOVA ( $p = .06$ ), this interaction was significant when we used bootstrapping ( $p = .04$ ; see Figure 1, Panel B). When we entered both mediators (victim blame and perpetrator blame) into the model, this significant interaction effect for guilt likelihood became non-significant. Bias corrected 95% confidence intervals for victim blame [-.342, -.042]; and perpetrator blame [-.769, -.133] did not include zero, showing that both were significant mediators. In support of Hypothesis 3, reduced punishment severity and guilt likelihood for culturally similar perpetrators in the counter-stereotypic victim condition, could be explained by both the increase in victim blame, as well as the decrease in perpetrator blame.

### **Discussion**

Previous research has shown that counterstereotypic-victim behaviour is more likely to negatively affect a rape victim's case in the context of acquaintance, as opposed to stranger, rape (McKimmie et al., 2014). In the current study, we investigated whether the negative impact of counterstereotypic-victim behaviour occurs more when perceivers are similar to perpetrators, than in the context of acquaintance rape. Predictions were based on theorising within the social identity tradition (Tajfel & Turner, 1986; Turner et al., 1987), and related findings on ingroup bias (cf. Brewer, 1999; Harrison et al., 2008), showing that bias effects are most pronounced when there is information that could be used to generate doubt

about what occurred. Participants were presented with a summary of an acquaintance-rape case. We manipulated perpetrator similarity by describing defendants as being from either similar (Western) or dissimilar (Eastern) backgrounds to White-Australian participants, and complainant behaviour as either conforming (stereotypic) or not conforming (counterstereotypic) to expectations of rape victims. We assessed participant's ratings of victim and perpetrator blame, punishment severity, and guilt likelihood.

Consistent with predictions, when victim behaviour was stereotypic, victim and perpetrator evaluations did not vary as a function of perpetrator-cultural similarity. When victim behaviour was counterstereotypic, victim blame was higher and perpetrator blame and punishment severity lower, for culturally similar, compared to culturally dissimilar, perpetrators. Predictions for the measure of guilt likelihood were not supported in the ANCOVA, as the perpetrator-cultural similarity by victim stereotypicality interaction trended in the predicted direction but was not significant. However, the predicted interaction for guilt likelihood was significant using bootstrapping, a more robust technique requiring fewer assumptions about the data (Erceg-Hurn & Mirosevich, 2008). Also consistent with predictions, moderated mediation revealed that reduced punishment severity and guilt likelihood for culturally similar perpetrators in the counterstereotypic-victim condition could be explained by increased victim blame and decreased perpetrator blame.

We also predicted that two-way interactions would not be moderated by participant gender. As predicted, no significant three-way interactions involving participant gender for the measures of victim blame, perpetrator blame, punishment severity, or guilt likelihood were revealed. Women, like men, used counterstereotypic-victim behaviour to excuse culturally similar perpetrators.

Finally, we predicted that, based on men's gender-based similarity to perpetrators (and gender-based dissimilarity to victims), men would have more positive evaluations of

perpetrators, and less positive evaluations of victims, than women. This hypothesis was not supported, as there were no significant differences between men's and women's responses for the measure of victim blame, perpetrator blame, punishment severity, or guilt likelihood. While meta-analyses have shown that men are more likely to endorse victim blame than women (Anderson, Cooper, & Okamura, 1997; Suarez & Gadalla, 2010), it is also the case that women's own experience of rape, or exposure to rape victims, attenuates their rape acceptance (Anderson et al., 1997). As we relied on a self-selected sample in the current research, it is possible that the lack of gender differences occurred because women who had been victims of rape chose not to participate.

Another possible explanation for the lack of gender differences is that the cultural similarity manipulation minimized gender salience. Had we described similar perpetrators as Australian (like the victim), rather than American or English, the salience of culture may have been reduced and the salience of gender may have increased, leading to the emergence of more typical gender differences. Consistent with this possibility, findings from the manipulation check for perpetrator-cultural similarity revealed no main effects or interactions involving participant gender. It is also possible that because the scenario depicted a woman violating traditional gender roles (e.g., by going back to the apartment of a man she did not know well), that participants' endorsement of traditional gender-role beliefs (e.g., benevolent sexism; cf. Glick & Fiske, 1996) was more important for predicting their reactions than participant gender (cf. Viki, Abrams, & Masser, 2004). Whatever the reason for the lack of significant gender differences, they do reveal that women's responses can be difficult to distinguish from men's, and therefore that both men's and women's views about rape (especially the legitimacy of finding excuses for rape when perpetrators are culturally similar) need to be challenged.

### **Practice Implications**

The harmful effects of prescriptive stereotypes for rape victims are widely recognized (Grubb & Turner, 2012; Suarez & Gadalla, 2010). Our research findings are the first to demonstrate that violating these stereotypes is more likely to undermine the case of a victim who alleges rape against a perpetrator perceivers view as culturally similar to themselves. Our findings highlight the importance of finding ways to tackle the biased application of rape-victim stereotypes. While this is unlikely to be easy, research on the black-sheep effect (see Marques & Paez, 1994 for a review) shows that making excuses for ingroup (i.e., similar) perpetrators is not inevitable. Rather, where norms against certain behaviour are clear, sanctions against ingroup violators can be even more severe than those experienced by members of outgroups (Marques, Yzerbyt, & Leyens, 1988).

Efforts by activists and those in the media to highlight and challenge the greater tolerance of rape when it is committed by culturally similar perpetrators, especially when a victim's behaviour is counterstereotypic, are needed (cf. Fabiano, Perkins, Berkowitz, Linkenbach, & Stark, 2003). Efforts that are likely to be effective in this regard include challenging beliefs that "ordinary" (i.e., relatable) men are unlikely to commit rape, as well as shifting the responsibility for rape prevention away from victims (and therefore victim behaviour) towards men as potential perpetrators (Lonsway, 1996). Rape prevention programs in college communities that teach men to be positive bystanders have shown great potential for reducing rape-supportive attitudes and behaviours (e.g., see Banyard, Moynihan, & Crossman, 2009; Foubert, Godin, & Tatum, 2009; Gidycz, Orchowski, & Berkowitz, 2011).

The implications of the findings for men's and women's reactions to rape cases that involve people other than themselves are similar. For men as potential perpetrators, the reduced likelihood of seeing the behaviour of a culturally similar perpetrator in the victim-counterstereotypic condition as problematic, suggests that men also may be less likely to

regard their own behaviour in such circumstances as consistent with rape. For women as potential victims, the increased likelihood of applying rape-victim stereotypes to protect culturally similar perpetrators, suggests that women may also be more likely to blame themselves for rape in such circumstances (cf. Heath et al., 2011). As self-blame has been negatively linked to reporting rape (Starzynski, Ullman, Filipas, & Townsend, 2005), women may also be less likely to report a rape that is committed by a culturally similar perpetrator. For those working with rape victims in the aftermath of an assault, including therapists, counsellors, and the police, a consideration of the negative effect that a perpetrator's cultural similarity may have on a victim's interpretation of events, and intentions to report the assault, may be warranted.

### **Limitations and Future Directions**

In the current study, we varied the cultural similarity of perpetrators to White-Australian participants, however we did not vary the Australian background of the victim, and we implied that she was ethnically White by giving her a stereotypically White name (Rebecca/Emily). In addition to perpetrator similarity, we also varied whether or not the depicted rape was interethnic or intraethnic. Rather than positive ingroup bias, our results could therefore reflect negative stereotypes that racial/ethnic-minority men are more likely to rape White women. However, such negative stereotypes are unlikely to provide an explanation of our findings because: (1) results were independent of the measure of racial prejudice (negative-outgroup bias); (2) culturally-different perpetrators were not rated as more stereotypic of rapists than culturally similar perpetrators; and (3) differences in rape perceptions based on perpetrator similarity (ethnicity) were limited to the victim-counterstereotypic condition. Had bias towards culturally similar perpetrators occurred across the victim-stereotypicality conditions, negative stereotypes that ethnic-minority men are more likely to rape White women would have provided a more plausible explanation.

Our findings do appear to reflect prejudice based on positive ingroup bias (cf. Brewer, 1999; Harrison et al., 2008). However to establish the generalizability of the ingroup bias effects shown here beyond a White Australian sample, additional research is needed to examine whether participants from alternative ethnic backgrounds show equivalent bias towards similar perpetrators. Determining how and whether responses are affected by varying the cultural similarity of a rape victim vis-à-vis perceivers will also be important. Research by Harrison et al. (2008) described in the Introduction, has shown that people are less willing to use counterstereotypic-victim behaviour to undermine an ingroup victim's rape claim. When victims are from a different cultural background to perceivers, it is possible that bias towards culturally similar perpetrators is even larger. Indeed, reduced similarity to victims may provide an even greater basis for participants to feel similar to perpetrators, increasing their tendencies to use a victim's violation of rape-victim stereotypes in a perpetrator's defence (see George & Martinez, 2002 for findings that white perpetrators faced reduced culpability for interracial, rather than intraracial, rape).

Future research could also be used to examine whether reactions to rape are affected when both the perpetrator and the victim are from a different cultural background to perceivers. In this type of scenario, cultural salience might be reduced and the salience of gender increased, highlighting men's (but not women's) similarity towards perpetrators. This could in turn increase men's likelihood of using violations of rape-victim stereotypes to defend culturally dissimilar perpetrator. However, contrary to their predictions, research in the United States by George and Martinez (2002) found that the culpability of Black perpetrators (as judged by predominantly White participants) was actually greater when rape involved a Black—as opposed to a White—female victim. Nonetheless, this specific pattern of findings may depend on prejudice toward White women who associate with men from alternative ethnic/racial groups (cf. George & Martinez, 2002). Going beyond the typical

male perpetrator and female victim case of rape will also be important for determining the broader applicability of the current findings.

In the current research, we described dissimilar perpetrators as being of either Indian or Pakistani origin. Indians and Pakistanis are not distinct outgroups in Australia, but fit into one or two (i.e., “Asian” or “Muslim”) of the five major cultural outgroups (Dunn et al., 2004). Our findings indicate that participants saw perpetrators of Indian and Pakistani origin as equally dissimilar and, as discussed above, effects were unlikely to be due to racial prejudice (negative outgroup bias). However, had the “Muslim” background of perpetrators (e.g., from Pakistan) been emphasised, racial prejudice may have played a greater role. Compared to other cultural outgroups, Muslims in Australia face high levels of intolerance, and are especially likely to be regarded as sexist (Dunn et al., 2004; Ho, 2007). Future research is needed to determine whether racial prejudice for perpetrators from particularly derided outgroups has an additional effect on how a rape victim’s case is perceived.

The current findings do not appear to reflect negative outgroup bias, however effect sizes in this research were generally small. Racial prejudice may have accounted for additional variance if we had measured it differently. To increase measurement accuracy, the general measures of racial prejudice we used could be adapted to relate specifically to the cultural groups examined. Alternatively, more implicit measures of racial prejudice could be used to limit socially desirable responding (e.g., the Implicit Association Test: Greenwald, McGhee, & Schwartz, 1998). Beyond negative outgroup bias, future research might also examine the effects of strength of ingroup identification. Research has shown that people who identify strongly with their ingroups are more defensive in response to ingroup criticism (Doosje, Branscombe, Spears, & Manstead, 1998). It is possible that those who identify particularly strongly with their cultural ingroup (e.g. Western/White), are also most likely to use counter-stereotypic victim behaviour in a culturally similar perpetrator’s defence.



In the current research, we used cultural background to manipulate perpetrator similarity, however there are many bases upon which perceivers could feel similar to perpetrators. As outlined in the Introduction, researchers have found that being from the same university as perpetrators or victims affects how rape is perceived (Bal & van den Bos, 2010; Harrison et al., 2008). Future research could examine whether similarity based on university membership is also associated with an increased use of counterstereotypic-victim behaviour in a perpetrator's defence. Beyond demographic categories, qualitative evidence suggests that perpetrator stereotypicality, which is likely to be greater in stranger-rape cases (Du Mont et al., 2003), provides another basis for perceivers to make similarity judgements. Future research could also explore whether dissimilarity to stereotypic perpetrators explains the diminished application of rape-victim stereotypes in stranger-rape contexts (cf. McKimmie et al., 2014).

We attempted to make the summary of evidence of the court case in the current research as realistic as possible. However, studies based on written summaries of complex events can only capture a small part of the reality they seek to represent (Worell & Robinson, 1994). Jurors in an actual court case would receive substantially more information on which to base their judgements, and caution in generalizing our findings to the outcomes of an actual court case is warranted. Our findings may be more relevant to understanding the effect of rape-victim stereotypes in other social contexts, such as a summary of a rape trial in the media (cf. Franiuk, Seefeldt, Cephress, & Vandello, 2008), or a retelling of events by peers. To increase generalizability for future studies, short written vignettes could be replaced with longer audio or video recordings of court cases utilizing trained actors. To increase experimental control, immersive virtual environment technology simulating actual court cases could also be utilized (cf. Blascovich et al., 2002).

Future researchers might also use multi-item scales to measure guilt likelihood and punishment severity. While single-item measures for these types of evaluations have been used in previous research (e.g., George & Martinez, 2002; McKimmie et al., 2014), multi-item measures would enable greater accuracy in the assessment of their meaning to participants. Implicit measures could also be incorporated in future research, such as the amount of physical distance desired from a rape defendant or complainant (cf. Bal & van den Bos, 2010), to help limit a reliance on face-valid scales. Very few rape cases make it to court (Daly & Bouhours, 2010), so examining the effect of perpetrator-cultural similarity in other contexts will also be important. As support from friends, family, social service providers and police are known to influence a victim's prosecution decisions (Anders & Christopher, 2011), they provide obvious next contexts to examine the effects of a perpetrator's cultural similarity. Using different contexts would also enable an examination of a broader range of responses, such as the type and extent of support victims receive in the aftermath of an assault, including whether or not they are supported in making a formal complaint.

## **Conclusions**

The unhelpful social focus on how women as victims of rape should behave—rather than on the problematic behaviour of men as perpetrators—is reflected in the literature; the ways that women's behaviour can be used to excuse rape have been thoroughly reported. While exposing the content of prescriptive stereotypes of rape victims is important, the current research shows that the impact of perceivers' use of these stereotypes is affected by who the perpetrator is—specifically, whether the perpetrator is from a cultural background that is similar to the background of perceivers. Finding effective ways to challenge the social norms that currently tolerate the use of counterstereotypic-victim behaviour to excuse culturally similar perpetrators is likely to be important for ensuring that greater justice is afforded to rape victims.



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## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup>Results without the racial prejudice covariate were largely unchanged. Only for perpetrator blame did the significant interaction ( $p = .029$ ) become a non-significant trend, ( $p = .066$ ).

Table 1

*Correlations between Victim and Perpetrator Blame, Punishment Severity, Guilt Likelihood, and Racial Prejudice*

	1	2	3	4
1. Victim blame	—			
2. Perpetrator blame	-.67**	—		
3. Punishment severity	-.49**	.61**	—	
4. Guilt likelihood	-.57**	.68**	.51**	—
5. Racial prejudice	.20**	-.21**	-.15*	-.14*
<i>N</i>	237			

\* $p < .05$ , \*\* $p < .01$ .

Table 2

*Victim-Stereotypicality by Perpetrator-Cultural-Similarity Interaction Effects: Means (SDs) and Simple Effects for the Interaction between Victim Stereotypicality and Perpetrator-Cultural Similarity, with Racial Prejudice as a Covariate.*

			Victim stereotypicality			
			Stereotypic		Counterstereotypic	
			Perpetrator culture		Perpetrator culture	
Measure	<i>F</i> value	$\eta_p^2$	Similar	Dissimilar	Similar	Dissimilar
Victim blame	5.20*	.02	3.23 (1.28)	3.33 (1.66) <i>ns</i>	4.22 (1.44)	3.49 (1.28)**
Perpetrator blame	4.82*	.02	5.43 (1.02)	5.48 (1.19) <i>ns</i>	4.40 (1.31)	5.05 (1.14)**
Punishment severity	7.39**	.03	5.45 (1.30)	5.40 (1.54) <i>ns</i>	3.59 (1.97)	4.76 (1.68)**
Guilt likelihood	3.53†	.01	5.47 (1.48)	5.46 (1.54) <i>ns</i>	4.01 (1.62)	4.81 (1.47)**

*Note.* *F* tests are for the interaction, *df*(1, 228). †*p* < .10, \**p* < .05, \*\**p* < .01.



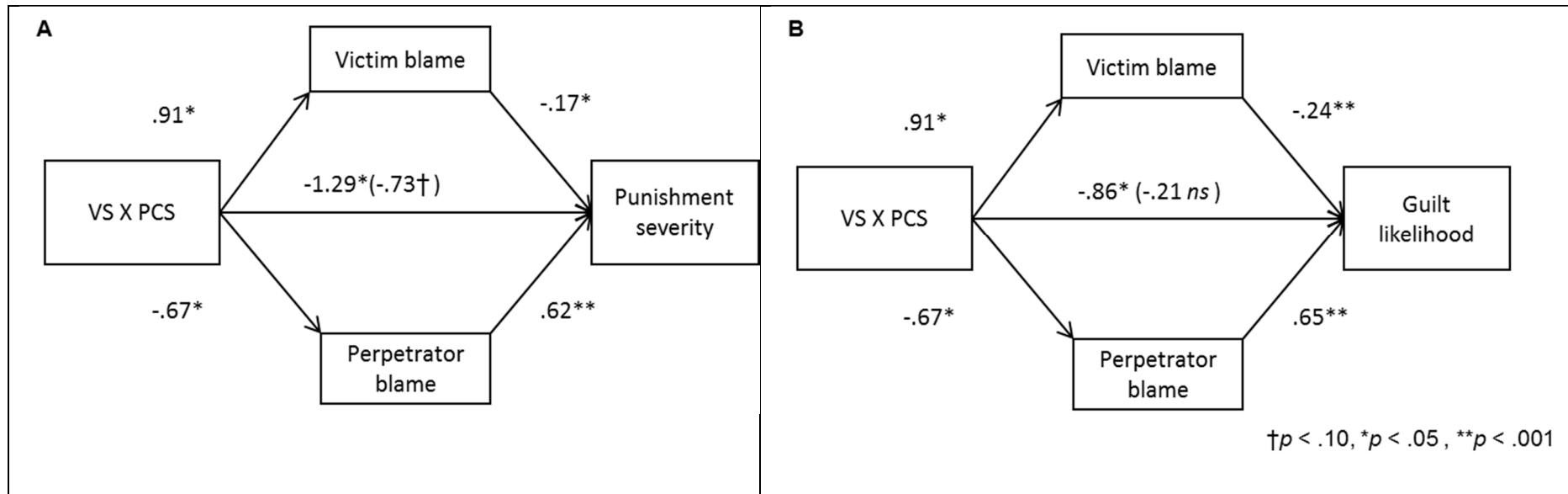


Figure 1. Moderated mediation model showing the effect of the victim-stereotypicality (VS) by perpetrator-cultural-similarity (PCS) interaction on punishment severity (Panel A) and guilt likelihood (Panel B) mediated by victim blame and perpetrator blame, with racial prejudice as a covariate.